

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON OPERATION OF HOPPER DREDGES
IN THE CORPUS CHRISTI SHIP CHANNEL PROJECT

April 2003 – July 2003

On April 9, 2003 the contract hopper dredge *Atchafalaya* began work on the Entrance Channel of the Corpus Christi Ship Channel Project. Contract specifications required dredging an estimated 1,153,000 cubic yards (CY) of shoal material. The required depth of dredging was 49 feet below Mean Low Tide (MLT, Corps of Engineers Datum), with 2 feet of allowable overdepth dredging.

Dredging began on April 9, 2003, and was completed on July 7, 2003. A total of 746 loads of dredged material were collected and deposited into Placement Area No. 1. Dredging was performed between Stations -38.03 and -30+00 in the Inner Basin and from Stations 86+00 to 210+00 along the Outer Bar Channel. A total of 930,657 CY of material were excavated from this project.

The dredge was equipped with rigid draghead turtle deflectors, and 100% inflow screening with a 4-inch square mesh. NMFS-approved turtle observers provided 24-hour/day monitoring of dragheads and screens for each load cycle. The observers were employed by REMSA, Inc. under a subcontract to the dredging contractor, B+B Dredging Co.

Relocation trawling was conducted on a 24-hour daily basis during dredging operations. On June 7, 2003 a second relocation trawler was added to provide better channel coverage. A total of 72 turtles were tagged and relocated. This total includes one leatherback; 15 Kemp's ridleys; and 56 loggerheads, three of which were recaptures. Additionally, one bottlenose dolphin was captured on June 24 but died on the way to a rehabilitation center. A copy of the trawling final report is enclosed.

During the performance of this dredging, a total of five lethal turtle takes were experienced. These included four loggerheads and one Kemp's ridley. The first take was the Kemp's ridley on April 13, in load No. 58. The water temperature during this take was about 18°C. All of the loggerheads were taken in May, on the 4th, 21st, 23rd and 24th in loads 241, 290, 387, and 392, respectively. The water temperature during these takes ranged from 26°C to 28°C. A copy of each incident report is enclosed.